

So Long, Banned Cards!

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When the DCI announced the changes in Extended on March 1, I was simply shocked and amazed. For most of **Magic's** history, I have tended towards disagreeing with R&D and the DCI. However, about two years ago, things started to change. Since that time, I have seen improvement after improvement made to the game regulations and the card sets are getting better all the time. March 1st, 2001, is the pinnacle of the improvement.

Replenish. **Demonic Consultation**. Survival of the Fittest.

Necropotence.

Now that the predators have been removed from the ecosystem of Extended, new life will emerge...

How long have we waited? The day finally arrived when Extended players everywhere rested easier, knowing that next season they would be playing with all new decks, all new strategies, and experiencing a whole new format. That is right, the absence of those four cards will create an entirely new format, ushering in a plethora of new archetypes.



The most significant of these and perhaps all subsequent bannings is the eradication of the most powerful card drawing engine ever printed: Necropotence. The power of death ruled with an iron fist every season since the Necro-Summer years ago. The most accurate description for a broken card is one that breaks the rules and mechanics of the game, creating a loophole that can be abused. Where does Necropotence fit in the scheme of things?

Necropotence is the most broken card since **Tolarian Academy**.

You may be asking yourself as I have over the years: What took the DCI so long to ban this card since it was overtly a dominating force. The policy of the DCI in regards to banning cards may not be very clear, but they all boil down to a single point: If a certain deck is dominating and having an undermining effect on an environment, something vital (the problem card) to the deck should be banned. Unfortunately, the problem card in a deck is not always easy to define. For instance, when the DCI decided to ban **Dark Ritual** and **Mana Vault**, it was because they believed that fast mana was the most vital portion of the popular Trix deck, among other combo decks that were taking the field by storm in the previous season. Many people stated that banning other portions of the most popular deck, such as **Illusions of Grandeur** or **Donate**, was the only solution to the problem. Banning these specific cards would simply let one of the other Dark Ritual/Mana Vault/Necropotence decks take the top spot as 'King Combo' for a while, because the speed of the decks was at issue, rather than their components.

Ok, so now that Necropotence is gone, why doesn't the above logic apply? The King is dead, long live the King? King Pandeburst? Replenish is banned. King Survival? Survival is Banned. If the DCI did not explain what they are trying to do effectively, let me tell you: They decided to rid Extended of all the most dominant decks that abuse broken or hyper-efficient cards. These bannings regulate the six or seven most powerful decks, and leave people with an imagination at an advantage.

The only old archetypes that remain are U/W Control, Counter-Sliver, White Weenie, Sligh, Stompy, and Oath. Keep in mind that there are many decks that can beat these handily, but they never emerged because they could not stand up to the power cards that just now got banned. Decks no longer have to worry about auto-losing to a broken deck. They can play real games of **Magic** instead of following the credo of: Mulligan to Force of Will or lose. Old cards will come out of the woodwork and new variants will be put to the test. Just think about how good Secret Force is now! Perhaps Counter-Post will make a comeback? Probably not with everyone packing 4 foil Wastelands...

While the bannings of Survival and Replenish may not have been as drastic as the axing of the Skull, they are surely significant. While both cards are broken, the bannings signify something more important than the removal of overpowered cards. The banning of these two cards shows that the DCI will use preemptive bannings, as they did with **Fluctuator** and **Earthcraft**, two cards that were not dominating the environment, but definitely would have, once the Academy deck was out of play. Everyone would surely decide that the decks that reflect Survival and Replenish would be the strongest decks left in the environment, in which case the Necro problem happens all over again, but with different cards (and probably not as drastic). Banning these cards now will prevent a lot of grief and agony ten months later. Kudos goes out to the DCI on this one.



The most intriguing of the four newly banned cards must be Demonic Consultation. This was surely the most powerful and risky tutor that was legal in Extended. It may not have been powerful enough to ban, but banning it should reduce the likeliness of any other broken combo decks arising by a significant amount.

Is it time to unban Dark Ritual and Mana Vault? Without the combo elements, it seems like it could be okay. There is no reason to hurt black beat-down or Tinker with these bannings, and they were obviously meant to kick the legs out from under Trix and Coco-Pebbles, which now present no serious threats without the Skull. Dark Ritual and Mana Vault were never really tame, but they were a staple part of the environment. Standard is a slow environment, Extended is a fast environment, and Classic is light speed. That is how it has always been, so Dark Ritual and Mana Vault could fit back into Extended nicely.

I can't wait to see what makes a comeback. The possibilities are endless. **Buried Alive**? Counter-Phoenix? Blue will definitely be a powerhouse, although I doubt the reason will be Force of Will, which recently has been put on the watch list. Force of Will is only as good as the best threats in the environment; therefore it cannot be broken unless everything else is. An example of this would be how broken Force of Will was in Rome, where Academy/Spiral decks were everywhere. It was never broken back in the days of Counter-Post and there are no such things as Force of Will-based combo decks.

Many people are afraid that the **Oath of Druids** based decks will run the field. This will not happen. Oath is the next natural deck choice in the progression of things, but now that the predators have been removed from the ecosystem of Extended, new life will emerge...new life that will eat Oath decks alive, in all probability. With deck options wide open, deck builders will have a field day when the Extended season rolls around again. My guess is that versatile creature decks will be popular, with Green coming out in full force. Black will still have a strong showing, but mostly in the support or rogue variety.

Overall, the new Extended will be fresh, fun, and exciting. I hope the DCI continues its recent trend of improvement, which will make **Magic** a better game. There are no mile high barriers left to stop innovative decks that use rarely seen cards from entering the playing field. There is a small part of me that is sad to see the power cards go, since they brought good times as well as bad, but this is the way things ought to be. When Extended season comes around, I wouldn't be surprised if people start playing decks with cards that their opponents have to pick up and read, and that is truly what the game is all about.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this or any of my articles, feel free to give me an email at natehiess@yahoo.com. Definitely be sure to email me if you have any crazy rogue decks for the new Extended!